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ABSTRACT

This guide is the tenth in a series of eleven generated in 1978 as the result of workshops that focused on peer training, a different approach to teaching. The workshops provided the opportunity for members of eleven identified role groups to work together with peers to examine the relationship between their specific role group and community education and the ways in which they could stimulate their peers to improve role performance and effectiveness. This booklet focuses on community education as seen by cooperative extension agents who are trained in community resource development work. Topics considered include responsibilities of agents, steps to implementing community education in a community, and benefits and problems of a partnership between ccoperative extension and community education. (Author/LD)

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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AGENTS AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Role Guide Series #10

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Larry E. Decker, Project Director
Sharon M. Rubright, Project Assistant

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Cooperative Extension Agents
and
Community Education

*In some states known as the Agricultural Extension Service. This publication will use the term Cooperative Extension Service to refer to the Land Grant University Extension Service which is a cooperative effort of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, state and local government.

Edited by
Ted Ashby
Sharon M. Rubright

Contributing Extension Agents:

Willie G. Adams
Dover, DE

Ted Ashby (Facilitator)
Ronaoke, VA

Marchanelle Dennis
Washington, DC

William M. Garmon
Raleigh, NC

Freedom B. Goode
Gloucester, VA

Alberta Jarrell
Charleston Heights, SC

Barrett Larrimore
Charleston, SC

Steve Parson (Facilitator)
Blacksburg, VA

Harvey W. Shelton
Ronaoke, VA

Bruce Sorter
Columbia, MD

Acknowledgements:
Academies Material Facilitator: Sharon M. Rubright
Technical Reviews: Mary Lou Howerton & Joseph Ringer, Jr.
Editing and Rewrite: Virginia A. Decker
Typing: Ginny Alley and June Seay

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PREFACE

This booklet is a result of two three-day Role Training and Peer Interaction Academies which were held in 1978 and funded by a training grant from the U.S. Office of Education, Community Education Program. The format for both Academies was designed to focus upon peer training, a method which has proven to be a useful teaching and information sharing approach. The sessions provided the opportunity for members of eleven identified role groups to work together with peers to examine in-depth:

a) the relationship between their specific role group and community education, and

b) the ways in which they could stimulate their peers to improve role performance and effectiveness.

Material development phases were interwoven with both structured and unstructured problem-solving activities. The follow-up activities and publications of the Role Guide Series were made possible from grants by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Through a sharing of information, all participants gained knowledge. The information shared in this booklet is intended for use both by experienced individuals and those just entering the field. The booklet can help the experienced individual to become more aware of additional aspects of the role and of directions being taken by others. It can assist the novice in gaining an overview of the role as seen by those who have worked in this capacity. The information also can be used as a means for guiding others in the community to gain a better understanding of the role and its relationship to community education.

AS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AGENTS, WE BELIEVE

We believe that people have the capacity to control their destiny; community education is a democratic process; requires citizen involvement; and full utilization of community facilities.

We believe that it is important for community education to be understood primarily as a process and not as a program.

We believe in the establishment of clear-cut goals and objectives based on the needs that have been determined by the people, and in evaluating progress toward reaching those objectives.

We believe that extension agents have organizational leadership which can be utilized to strengthen community education processes through the involvement of people in assessing needs and through the development of a mechanism to bring about a comprehensive program delivery system.

We believe that leadership should be shared among partner agencies and organizations in order to insure compatible relationships.

We believe that community education is one method of facilitating community resource development and that it has tremendous potential for bringing community people together to work at solving problems and increasing opportunities for individual and community improvement.

We believe that those in cooperative extension and in community education must be flexible in order to help people create the mechanism to bring about the desired program delivery system, whether it be a school-based, community-based, or agency-based model.

INTRODUCTION

The cooperative extension service is a cooperative effort of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and state and local governments to establish a catalyst for helping to build better communities. The agency has the responsibility for developing in every county (and, more recently, in many cities) a continuous process through which a representative citizen council and other local agency or resource persons study the local situation, identify major problems and opportunities, establish objectives, and plan and carry out a program of education relating to agriculture, home economics, 4-H (youth development) and community resource development. All areas relate to community education programming, but perhaps the community resource development program is the one program which can be of most help in accomplishing the objectives of community education. There are extension personnel in every county in the nation who are trained in community resource development work.

Because of the many commonalities between community education and cooperative extension, the following sections present community education and cooperative extension as a joint venture. The discussions held by extension agents and community educators produced a general consensus regarding the role of the cooperative extension agent in both the development and implementation of community education and regarding the recommendations for a successful continuation of that joint venture.

LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

An area in which cooperative extension and community education are in philosophical agreement is the process aspect of community education. In addition to this process emphasis, they also share a commitment to function democratically. Extension agents have the responsibility of conducting voluntary information programs based on findings from physical and social science research in a manner that will improve the quality of life for all citizens in the community. This responsibility relates directly to the basic goals of community education:

a) To encourage the development of a comprehensive and coordinated delivery system for providing educational, recreational, social, and cultural services for all people in a community, and

b) to provide an opportunity for people to work together to achieve community and self-improvement.

The goals combined with the major responsibility of extension agents result in the following leadership responsibilities for agents in a joint venture for community education development:

- To insure the development of the community education process by organizing and developing community councils, by serving as a resource to these councils, by helping to maintain and support community councils, and by assisting in developing linkages between those councils and resource agencies within the community.

- To help promote the broad acceptance of the community education concept
- To create an awareness of community education with other extension staff and with the community
- To serve as a resource to existing programs

Process is important to successful program development in both service delivery systems. Extension agents who establish cooperative efforts with community education should have strong process skills and content expertise. Organizational, planning, and communication skills also are essential tools to facilitate community education development.

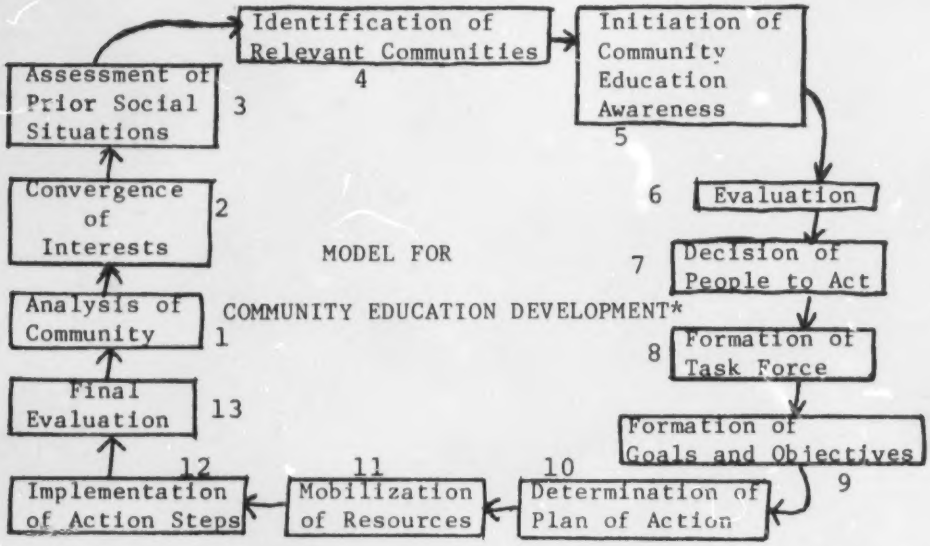
Extension agents providing leadership to community education development should have empathy for people. Self-confidence, maturity, and flexibility also are important personal attributes. The extension agent will meet a variety of audiences and must be able to relate well to all people across the social and economic spectrum. Self-assurance and an ability to adjust to ever-changing circumstances that occur in a process model are essential along with the personal maturity necessary to accept gracefully the inevitable criticism that will be directed toward any change agent.

Extension agents also must have respect for other agencies and should have a commitment to coordinate with other agencies. Because no one individual or agency possesses all the skills and attributes important in carrying out leadership responsibilities in community education development, it is important to share and engage in mutually beneficial ventures and experiences. The relationships established between the extension agent and each of the many individuals in cooperating agencies and organizations will differ depending on the community and the project. In various cooperative relationships, the agent may serve as consultant, enabler, facilitator, catalyst and/or initiator.

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The initial steps in implementing a joint venture for community education are to gain acceptance of the concept by extension administration and to provide in-service training in community education for extension agents and administration. Key citizens should be involved in this phase of development as well.

Once acceptance has been gained from extension administration it becomes possible to formulate a plan of community education development. Extension agents are in an excellent position to assist their communities in examining and implementing the concept of community education. The following model has been adapted to describe an approach to implementing community education in a community. The model is an adaptation of a social action model familiar to many in extension and depicts a developmental rather than a programming process.



* The ongoing process must be assessed as each phase is accomplished.

In describing this model, Steve Parson[1] wrote:

> Progress in social action is often hard to evaluate. Some tend to evaluate simply on whether or not the desired outcome was achieved, and that is certainly a valid criterion. Social action, however, tends to progress in stages from the inception of the idea through the developmental stage to implementation and evaluation. The model will help to guide and evaluate the progress a community is making toward community education development.

Step 1 - Analysis of Existing Community

It is important to define the community that will be affected by community education. In order to be effective in providing leadership for social action, the extension agent must understand and identify with the particular community where the action is taking place.

Step 2 - Convergence of Interest

All social action begins when people with common interests decide to cooperate in order to share and expand those interests. These people may be citizens, agency professionals, or government officials. A meeting of those persons sharing some common interests will facilitate action. The extension agent working with an extension specialist or a staff member from one of the centers for community education should develop a presentation to inform the community members about the community education concept.

Step 3 - Assessment of Prior Social Situation

Many people initially misinterpret one of community education's components as representing

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[1]Guide to Community Education Development, Publication 757, Extension Division, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, November, 1977.

the total concept because of a general lack of understanding. The comment often heard when the community education concept is introduced is "Oh, yes we are already doing that. We've got a tremendous adult education program." This type of comment is to be expected because community education seldom is developed from "point zero." In most communities, some aspects of community education already exist; and data on past developments will be important to the on-going planning of community education.

Step 4 - Identification of Relevant Segments of Communities

The objective at this stage is not to implement the concept, but to develop support for introducing and exploring the concept within the community. This support can be developed through programs designed to create an awareness of community education. Action programs should involve directly all parts of the community within which the action takes place. The usual strategy is to identify target groups within the community that are most relevant to the action under consideration.

Step 5 - Initiation of Community Education Awareness

In some communities, the community education concept has been implemented through a unilateral decision on the part of a group of "formal legitimizers," such as a school board or a county board of supervisors. There also have been instances when groups in the community who were left out of the planning have failed to support the initiated program. At this stage it is necessary to reach a broad spectrum of the community to create an awareness of community education (what it is and what it can do). There is a need for people who can provide resources (time, communication skills, organizational skills, and access to people or groups) to assist the general community in becoming aware of community education and its potential.

Step 6 - Evaluation

The process of evaluation should be a continual one, taking place at all stages of development. Evaluation is inserted in the model at this stage to emphasize the importance of reviewing actions taken; examining immediate, intermediate, and ultimate goals; and exploring alternative means of reaching those goals. It is important to note that there should be an evaluation both of goal attainment (how far have we progressed) and of the processes being used (how did we get where we are).

Step 7 - Decision of People to Act

If community education is to become a vehicle for progress, the citizens must be committed to taking action. It is not enough for people to be simply aware of the problem; they must be motivated to do something about it.

Step 8 - Formation of Community Education Task Force

After the community members generally agree that community education has potential benefits for the community, a task force should be established. The task force ideally would be appointed by the school board or local governmental body. The task force would be given a specific period of time in which to perform the tasks required of it. It is assumed that this task force would utilize individuals and committees representative of all segments of the community in doing its work.

Step 9 - Formation of Goals and Objectives

After accepting the report of the task force and deciding to take action, the community members (usually through an organized group such as an advisory council) should formulate and prioritize the goals and objectives that are to be attained by implementing community education. These goals and objectives should be based on addressing the needs of the community as identified by the task force.

Step 10 - Determination of Plan of Action

In order to pursue goals and objectives, a specific series of actions should be planned. Organizational structure, designation of responsibilities, planning of specific activities, timing, etc. are all part of this step.

Step 11 - Mobilization of Resources

This stage refers specifically to the organization and mobilization of resources related to the implementation of community education. In the plan of action, attention must be given to obtaining and organizing the resources to implement the program. These resources might be secured from: park and recreation departments, parent-teacher organization, community and civic groups, chamber of commerce, neighborhood improvement associations, community colleges, etc.

Step 12 - Implementation of Action Steps

The plan of action for implementing community education is carried out in the step-by-step process established in Step 10.

Step 13 - Final Evaluation

The evaluation should focus not only on those areas where stated goals were not satisfactorily attained, but also on those goals that were successfully accomplished. In addition to evaluating goal attainment, an evaluation should be made of how the program was carried out -- community involvement, committees, conflicts, group relations developed, problems encountered, etc.

This model should not be confused with a "program development" model. This model is specifically designed to assist a community in community education development. Once community education has been initiated, a program development model should be implemented which would focus on problems, needs, and resource identification as the basis for specific programs.

BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS

There are a number of identifiable benefits that can be derived from a partnership between cooperative extension and community education. The partnership:

- Enhances extension program delivery
- Provides a system for joint needs assessment and identification
- Provides an opportunity for program expansion
- Provides additional facilities
- Provides new avenues of visibility with new publics
- Increases interaction with community agencies and organizations
- Provides an avenue for cooperative planning with partner agencies and organizations

Among the major problems that extension agents should be expected to encounter in the development and implementation of community education are the following:

- A lack of common goals and purposes among all participating community agencies
- A fear of losing "turf"
- Utilization only as instructional personnel in community education programs
- Failure to receive recognition or credit for programs or services

- The fact that "pay-offs" to community education classes are often geared to eight-to-ten week sessions and, therefore, require a commitment of time difficult for extension agents to justify

- A lack of understanding of both community education and cooperative extension

- A lack of communications and coordination among on-going programs

The greatest of these problems is the first named -- a lack of common goals and purposes between all participating agencies. This problem is, however, not insurmountable; but solving it does require a great deal of effort. Alternative strategies for dealing with this problem require that agencies participate in the following activities:

- Working to gain a common understanding of the community education concept as a process. The name "community education" may be a hinderance because people often think of it as a static concept offering only programs. It is necessary to constantly emphasize the dynamic nature of community education.

- Engaging in role clarification. This activity is a prerequisite for extension as well as other institutions and agencies.

- Seeking to mesh goals. Working together in cooperation, agencies often can serve the community more effectively than is possible when working in isolation.

- Developing an atmosphere in which to deal effectively with conflict.

- Developing a mechanism for feedback and adjustment.

- Evaluating agency roles on an on-going basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community educators' programming should provide an informal structure for meeting the educational, social, and recreational needs of adults in addition to dealing with the learning problems of youth. It should focus on contemporary issues such as on citizenship, on helping people become more involved in the governmental process, on careers, and on energy.

Community educators should involve the human services delivery system in the community. Continuous use of facilities (schools, churches, etc.) as sites for the delivery of needed services will help to insure that needed services are available to all. The partnership concept for agency cooperation is essential.

Therefore, it is recommended that:

1. The scope of audience reached by community education programs be communicated to extension personnel so they are aware of potential audiences.

2. Extension personnel be invited to join and participate in community education association activities at state, regional, and national levels.

3. Community education people be invited to join and participate in Community Development Society activities and functions.

4. Extension agents be invited to serve as resources to community advisory councils.

5. Extension resources be used to conduct community leadership development programs.

6. Periodic meetings between extension agents and community education personnel be held to share roles and resources.

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